

the west coast poet does not care to hear  
the mention in his presence of the east coast poet.

the east coast poet is a vegetarian;  
the west coast poet is a drunk.

the east coast poet is a homosexual;  
the west coast poet makes fun of gays.

they both write poems  
that are readable, funny, dirty,

and great.

#### REQUIEM FOR THREE BAR GUYS

Ernest Hemingway used to say, "There are people  
dying this year who never died before,"

and, in How It Was, Mary Hemingway says it became  
an all-too-frequent refrain.

Well, I walked into the bar yesterday  
and there was a schooner on the counter  
with some bills and coins in it  
and a note attached that read, "Flowers for Claudio."  
"What happened to Claudio?" I asked,  
and the bartender said, "Friday night there was  
a disturbance outside his bar and he went out back  
and found this guy trying to drag some broad into a car.  
Claudio intervened, and the woman ran away,  
and there was a scuffle, and the guy pulled out a knife  
and got Claudio in a major artery."

"He died?"

"Sure."

"They get the guy who did it?"

"Do they ever?"

"I didn't know him."

"He was a good guy, just a young guy  
who'd worked hard and saved some money  
and got some backing and was trying to make a go  
of a place of his own. Everyone liked him."

Just then a guy down the bar said, "You knew about Nels,  
didn't you?"

"Nels?"

"The engineering professor who always drank in the 'Niner."



"Sure, I used to have a beer with him nearly every afternoon."

"He's dying of cancer of the tongue."

"Christ."

"He was one of the last of the good old boys from over at the university ... and what did you think of Tom?"

"Which Tom?"

"Two-Ton Tom that always drank with the Negretis. Truck-Driver Tom. Used to take the mike at the piano bar and sing 'Hello , Dolly,' like Louis Armstrong."

"He always went out of his way to be friendly to me, buy me a beer, ask about my poems ...."

"Stroke. Doctor says he's alive and nothing more than that."

"He couldn't have been fifty."

"He was a ton overweight and drank like we all do; what the fuck, there's nothing wrong with going quick."

So there in one day were three guys dead or dying from the old drinking triangle that used to extend from the Forty Niner Tavern near the campus to the Bayshore Saloon and the other joints of Belmont Shore to Clancy's and the Irisher of Main Street in Seal Beach.

I suppose they'd all seen as many good times as any man has a right to in one lifetime, but you know how it is about drinking times, they lose a lot in the re-telling, you'd have to have been there to appreciate them.

And I know this isn't much of an elegy, but then again some poems exceed their subjects and others, like this one, are doomed to fall short, because for my money these guys are no less worthy of remembrance than Lycidas or Thyrsis or, especially, that fucking asshole A. H. H.

And even if I've taken the edge off whatever lyricism I may once have been capable of, the result of a life similar to the one that killed these three guys off, I ask you

if I don't write their requiem,  
who the fuck do you know that will?